



SUPREME UKRAINIAN LIBERATION COUNCIL

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NEW YORK -- The Supreme Ukrainian Liberation Council (UHVR) is now in possession of additional information about last year's arson in the largest library of Ukraine, said Mykola Lebed, secretary general for foreign affairs of UHVR.

In October, 1963 Mr. Lebed brought the matter of the fire -- in the State Public Library of the Academy of Sciences, Ukrainian S. S. R. in Kiev -- to the attention of the Secretary General of UNESCO. He charged at the time that the fire, which was virtually ignored by the Soviet press, although it destroyed more than 600,000 books, was "a deliberate and carefully planned act of arson, done with the approval or knowledge of someone in authority."

"Since then, we have been able to gather additional information about the fire, and in particular, about the trial of the accused arsonist," Mr. Lebed said.

The defendant was a man named Pohrzhalsky, and not a woman, as was reported in the newspaper "Vechernaya Moskva" in May 1964, said Mr. Lebed, and added, that the trial took place at the end of August, 1963, or three months after the fire, in a small people's court on Volodarska St. in the Ukrainian capital.

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He went on to say that the trial was carefully staged by the KGB (Soviet security police), which had rehearsed the witnesses to preclude any suggestion that the arson was a planned attack against the Ukrainian cultural heritage.

The following information about the trial is now in possession of UHVR, Mr. Lebed said:

* Defendant Pohruzhal'skyy, who was employed at the time of the fire in the Marxism-Leninism department of the Library, was presented as a basically weak, but completely sane character, who had married and divorced many times. He was said to be a graduate of two universities and the Marxism-Leninism Institute.

* At least 600,000 books, including the index, all located on one floor of the Library, were destroyed by the fire. This section included archives pertaining to the old history of Ukraine, as well as books written during the pre-Revolution and early post-Revolution days.

* In defending himself Pohruzhal'skyy pointed out that during the past few years a number of Ukrainian books had been removed from the libraries and destroyed, thus he could not have had done such great crime. To this the court replied that previous destruction of books was done lawfully by the state, in accordance with a decree on the liquidation of so-called "scientifically and ideologically obsolete books."

* The court sentenced Pohruzhal'skyy to ten years' imprisonment. It is not known, however, whether Pohruzhal'skyy is serving the sentence.

"Neither the result of the trial, nor the result of a promised investigation into the cause of the fire had been made known by any of the Soviet newspapers allowed to be sold in the West," said Mr. Lebed.

"This is nothing but another phase of Russianization of non-Russian peoples of the U.S.S.R.," he said. "Last year there was a fire in the national library of Ukraine. Before that such fires broke out in the national libraries of at least two Asian republics of the Soviet Union."

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Mr. Lebed added, that while it was not brought out in the trial, it is nevertheless generally known by the residents of Kiev, that magnesium strips and boxes containing phosphorus were planted among the books before they were set afire. Moreover, when the firemen did arrive at the scene, they could not do anything for two hours, because just then there was no water in the fire hydrants in that section of Kiev.

Unlike the great libraries of the Russian Republic of the U.S.S.R., pointed out Mr. Lebed, the greatest library of Ukraine was not protected by any fire detecting or extinguishing equipment.

He said that UHVR is continuing to assemble further facts, and will shortly release more details about the planned destruction of the Ukrainian cultural heritage by the Central Committee of the CPSU.